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A BOOK OF DREAMS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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London: KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, & CO., 1 Paternoster Square.

A
BOOK OF DREAMS

BY
HARRIET ELEANOR HAMILTON KING

"AUTHOR OF 'THE DISCIPLES' 'ASFROMONTE' ETC.

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, & CO., 1 PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1883

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A DREAM MAIDEN.

My baby is sleeping overhead,
My husband is in the town ;
In my large white bed uncurtained,
All alone I lay me down.

And dreamily I have said my prayers,
And dreamily closed my eyes,
And the youth in my blood moves sweetly
As my pulses fall and rise.

I lie so peaceful and lonely,
A maiden in spirit-land,
With the moonbeams in at the window,
And hand laid close to hand.

A Dream Maiden.

I wander forth in the moonbeams,
All free of heart alone,
Neither awake nor dreaming,
To-night it is all one.

Light of step across the carpet
Of the flower-entangled spring,
Light of spirit through the haunted
Wood pathways murmuring.

The earth is telling her secrets,
Never shy or strange to me ;
My heart beating only silence,
One with her mystery.

All over the beautiful distance
The air is so fresh and pure,
The night is so cool and silvery,
The calm is so secure.

And afar, down into the sunrise,
The glittering dream-worlds shine ;
And by this free heart triumphant
I pass on to make them mine.

O elfin maiden, turn homeward,
And dream not so cold and wild!—
Have I not turned a woman?
Have I not husband and child?

THE BLUE DISTANCE.

FAR off in the enfoldings of the hills,—
Violet and blue and purple hues of air,—
A haze of light the western distance fills,
Autumnal warm and fair ;—

Midway upon their gentle shadowy slope,
Shutting the world out, open to the skies ;—
Perchance a shimmer of the ocean scope
Down in their opening lies.

They wind together in so close a maze,
It seems the path that follows to their heart
From valley unto valley streams and strays,
Showing but part and part.

Not where it leads into that inner fold,
Where surely doth the warm sun rest and stay,
And still such utter peace the day doth hold,
It broodeth there alway.

Are there not two this shining afternoon
Sitting within that hollow of the hills?
Wrapped all around with that low murmuring tune
The golden air which fills.

Do they not rest in one unshadowed trance,
Their blissful eyes reflected each in each?
The hours go by them in a slow sweet dance,
Too satisfied for speech.

There are they sitting in the mist of azure,—
Surely I mark the happy spot afar,—
There is the path whence I can find by measure
That fair place where they are.

Have they been resting there while cloudless flitting
The noon has past, and sunset now draws nigh?
Or was it yesterday they so were sitting?
—Or have there years gone by?

Shall I again find two, still rapture-hearted?
Are they there now, and is it always so?
Or will there be but one, and one departed?
This vexes me, to know.

How many times have I set out already !
It is so golden in the afternoon :
Immortal shines the halcyon light and steady,
And I shall find it soon.

But when I start upon the journey thither
The sky above my steps is dull and grey,
And all around the path hangs darkling weather,
Like light of common day.

And as I go it seems to draw no nearer,
But the embosoming hillsides intervene ;—
Each as I pass, I lose the distance clearer,
For turning-points between.

Surely if I can find it once more only,
That purple hollow in the purple hill,
Though I am one upon the road and lonely,
There will be two there still.

FOUR WATCHES.

NOON.

APPLE-BLOSSOM, apple-blossom—all the low boughs
pass

Rosy overhead, letting the deep sky through ;
Dark the hyacinth bows above the long lush grass,
Hardly waves the west wind from the far-off
fields of blue.

All around, the thrushes, all around the orchard
bower,

Sing so loud, so loud no other voice is heard :—
All around, the humming bees weave out the golden
hour

In a chain of filmy rustlings ;—softly, softly
stirred ;

Silent falls a shower of petals white and rosy,
Warm upon my neck and arms and face ;—
Soft, soft again, another shower drifts slowly :
—Why am I standing all alone within this place?

Heart, my heart, why beatest thou? The sudden
white and pink
Over my face why waver they, and pass?
Can I not look upward? Wherefore start and
shrink
At the coming—*what* is coming? through the
grass.

SUNSET.

ROSES, red roses,—in a low wall at my feet,
Roses all behind me, higher than my head,
Roses on either hand, crowding upwards full and
sweet,
And far in front the sunset, over heaven out-
spread.

Crimson sinks the sun in a burning crystal sea,
Crimson the cloudlet isles float over the stainless
glow,
Crimson the breathless earth enkindles suddenly
In the swift and sweeping wave of the heavens'
overflow.

All one way to the west the roses hearken and turn,
Far away are the heavens ; but the quiver and
thrill are near ;—
Is it the flame in the west, that my cheeks so
crimson burn ?
Why am I all alone among the roses here ?

Heart, my heart, be still ! Why through the still-
ness glowing

Beat so loud, so fast, I cannot hear a tread ?

Why does the low light dazzle my eyes from know-
ing

Who is coming near and nearer where the roses
are so red ?

MIDNIGHT.

ORANGE-BLOSSOM, orange-blossom,—all the Southern
night

Lit by the large moon, over the purple seas,
Out of the purple heaven,—all the earth unfolded
white,

And the white flowers shining, sparkling on the
trees.

Heavy and warm with fragrance, the air of the
night is still,

Down the white walls of my chamber the shadow
is stealing soon ;

The frogs croak out of the pools,—over scented
grove and hill

White miles of the orange-blossom meet the
whiteness of the moon.

Fast sleep the shadows on the floor of silver
thrown,

Not a bright leaf rustling low, or brushed aside ;—

All alone in the shadow,—am I all alone?

And why are the doors and windows open all so
wide?

Heart, my heart, breathe free! wherefore sink or
swoon?

What is there but silence, but sweetness in the
hour?

Am I so white, so white, with the glory of the
moon?

Dare I not look round me through the maze of
orange-flower?

SUNRISE.

PASSION-FLOWER, passion-flower,—through the break-
ing grey

The wreathen, pallid blooms look in through the
window pane ;

Opening, and opened, and faded, and dying before
the day,

The wan sprays beaten with wind and wet with
the pouring rain.

Pale their starry faces crowd the window ; they beat
and call

Against it, waxen-pale, with the passionate purple
streak ;

Out beyond them the sky in the east stretches
ghostly pale, and all

The shelterless waste of wind drives blind and
bleak.

The cold pale light is here, but all is misty and far;—

Am I here all alone ? Why is it I cannot see ?

Or are there many here?—no matter now if there
are,—

Or is there only one, O hand that is holding
me !

Heart, my heart, be still ! why, through the dawn-
ing early,

So faint, so cold, so slow, with all the passion
past ?

Why are my eyes so dim, I know, yet see not
clearly

Who is coming,—who is come—who is with me
now at last ?

REMEMBERED PATHS.

I WILL arise and go to-day ;
Surely I cannot miss the way.
It is not far,—one morning fair
We walked in autumn sunshine there;—
How young and strong and glad we were !

A thinly-wooded glen began,
A hurrying streamlet downward ran ;
The woodland ways were soft and green,
The little rivulet between
In merry flashes heard and seen.

It dances downward from its source
In quick clear streams of mountain force ;
Headlong its light cascades it throws,
Over the stones it churns and flows,
And bubbles on without repose.

So narrow that from moss to moss
At first we lightly stepped across ;
But as we walk it swells beside,
And now it rushes wild and wide,
All foaming white with rapid tide.

The firwood darkens o'er it still,
The odours of the firwood fill
The air, and underneath a bed
Of the dry needles fallen is spread,
Smooth and elastic to our tread.

A river now it rolls along
In the broad valley swift and strong ;
Close by, with all their flocks of snow,
Ceaseless against the rocks below
The multitudinous waters flow.

So near it is—why has it been
So long since I the place have seen ?
When was it last ? At least no more
I will delay,—I go before
Another hour of light is o'er.

Neighbours and friends, bridegroom and bride,
We walked that morning side by side ;
Our steps were light, our talk was gay ;—
Shall we not go again that way ?
Will it not be as bright to-day ?

Are all of us not here who came ?
Why should not all things be the same ?
Something is strange,—because I seem
To know so well the rush and gleam
Of that resounding forest stream :

And yet I cannot tell the day
When last I saw it,—and always
When I remember it, my mind
Is to go there once more to find
That morning long since left behind.

And still I stir not, though I know
That close at hand it winds below ;
And so the time slips idly on,
Till all is shadowy and unknown ;—
Now then at once I will begone.

There comes a blinding cloud of rain
And blots all waymarks out again ;
Darkness comes on, and it is night,
And suddenly before my sight
Something breaks off the memory quite.

Again and yet again it calls,
That noise of streaming waterfalls ;—
What does it matter, wind or rain ?
A few steps bring me there again,
And I shall know it sure and plain.

And passing that, what came the next
Is somewhat to my sense perplex ;
But after no long while our feet
Were on a down whose turf made fleet
The miles, with thyme and eyebright sweet.

The white clouds in the clear blue sky !
Why do the dull dark days go by,
And heavy toils chain down, and care,
While all that open noon is there,
The thistledown upon the air ?

The careless speech, the sunny hours,
The untired limbs,—and all are ours.
Is it not strange that we who knew,
Meet not more often to renew
The joys so easily that grew?

And from those grassy slopes, I know
A deep and hollow wood below
We entered,—but beyond no more
Can I recall : these paths of yore
Meseems some wave has here swept o'er.

I know that at the end of all
There was another waterfall :
But this one from an awful height.
A wonderful and far-famed sight
Fell roaring down and lost in night.

This was our pilgrimage's goal ;
Not far,—for twas a morning's stroll
But if it still be there I doubt,
So many years have blotted out
The paths and country all about.

This moment must I seize to seek,
Or all may vanish as I speak ;
So many a day, so many a year
Of fruitless wishes hovering near,
While yet the very scene is here.

Still I am here—what binds me fast?
Another vision too is cast
Before me, of a field full-blown
I wandered into once alone,
And ever since its place is gone.

It lies high up the meadow land,
All round it other meadows stand,
No landmark shows it—unaware
I entered one cool evening there
Through the grey grasses tall and fair,

Rustling around my knees to pass ;
But tall amid the flowering grass
Stood pale rare flowers, long sought unseen,
Orchis, day-lily, and helleborine,
And others crowding through the green.

They vanished with the setting sun,
Before I stooped to gather one ;
Nor will they reappear ; but still
I wander on with dreaming will,
To find another western hill.

But this was far—so far—away,
I reached it but at close of day,
And many a hill which now is lost
I rounded tired and travel-tost,
And many a rivulet I crost.

Till suddenly, I know not how,
I came out on the purple brow,
All mantled with the heather hue ;
And mid the bracken-gold I knew
One straight stalk where the moonwort grew.

But, facing full, the setting sun
Sank down again, and all was done ;
Yet in that moment's russet glow
I caught blue glimpses far below
That seemed like fairy-land to show.

And as I trod the lonely ground,
So deep a sense of peace breathed round,
I seemed the borderland to press
Of some enchanted wilderness
Springing in unknown loveliness.

Could I once more that summit win,
It seems as if there would begin
A golden way on every side,
Stretching into the moorland wide,
Irradiate and glorified.

But when I ponder on the quest,
All things are difficult at best ;
Right out of mind the way has past,
And if I find it at the last,
The evening will be closing fast.

Therefore at least it would be wise
At earliest daylight to arise,
And start ;—then if good hap attend,
I might have there, ere daylight end,
Some hours of afternoon to spend.

How many hours, how many days,
How many years the self-same ways
Of thought and memory I have traced.
Now or no more !—At once make haste !
—And still the moments run to waste.

A HOLIDAY.

A FRESH new day dawns for the world and me,
And all the day is consciously my own.
I am alone, and free, and without care ;
Having forgotten all that went before,
Having no guess of anything to come ;
Unchained to any ceaseless wheel of toil.
Hunger and thirst are not importunate,
There is no weariness of brain or limb,
Nor any failing of the even pulse,
To make the merely living less of joy.
I am not haunted by the absent eyes,
I am not longing for the parted hand ;
My heart is all my own, my life is mine ;
All is unknown and new, and I myself
Am to myself unknown ; and where I am
Is unknown to me, also whence I came.
If any shadow, as I dimly dream,

Hovers around, if there be anywhere
A common lot in which the common life
Is woven out of twisted dusty strands,
Inextricably mixed in cross and care,
At least I am outside of it to-day,
I have awakened in another sphere.

I would not lose one of these daylight hours
Of liberty, and that keen secret sense,
Most infinite in all its endless chance,
And most exhaustless in its earliest spring,
Of the unknown delight the day must bring.
Therefore, arising with the rising sun,
I pass alone into the open air,
The clear air with the low light all around ;
No smoke obscures the pale and shining sky,
Though this is a great city, and no stir
Of wheels or passengers is yet abroad
On the wide empty pavements swept and smooth.

A spacious city, with a forest growth
Of land and water, for a hundred spires
Tower over all, and the broad waterways
Glide through its midst, and ancient houses grey,
With high red roofs, are crowded to their edge,
And bridges cross beyond, and far away

Are stately openings, like a glimpse confused
Of fretted piles behind a thousand masts,
That line the port ; but close at hand the quays
On which I walk are solitary still,
And all the brigs and barges seem to sleep.
Yet here and there some early wayfarer
Is passing, like myself, but distant still.
How lucent is the morning ! It would seem
As if a great rain yesterday had washed
All things beneath the sky, both underfoot
And overhead :—in deep transparence blue
The shadows lie all down the gabled streets
As if in mountain valleys, and the light
Catches the gilded weathercocks like peaks.
But here the central space and waterside
Is rolled and flooded by the mounting sun,
And straight into the sunshine I walk on.
While momentarily the sunshine grows and spreads,
And from the shadows some fresh shapes stand clear ;
And chimies of bells begin to float above,
And mingle with the slight awakening sounds
Below :—and now, while still the morning air
Breathes its first freshness—what shall be the gift
The hour shall bring me ? what the springing flower
To meet the joyous springing of my blood ?
What is the quickening spirit on the wind

That quickens as with wings my unbound feet?
Unguided and unbidden, what compels
My aimless steps to follow to their goal?
What fortune of the future unforecast,
Moments of pearls strung on a golden thread,
Lies hidden in this daylong labyrinth?
Within what folding of these walled ways
Waits the foreshadowed reading of the tale?
Which is the way to turn? and what shall be
The new delight of the new scene disclosed?
What figure even now is on its way,
Through glittering haze of sunlight undiscerned,
Till face to face we meet, and I shall know
Why forward still I fare, and what is fate?

* * * * *

I pass adown a shadowed garden walk
That bends downhill; a thicket either hand
O'erarches in a high and ancient growth
Of dark and shining foliage still as sleep,
And all the path is overgrown with moss.
The sunbeams in their flickering green and gold
Still hold the morning light, as it might seem,
Three hours to noon. The wood-gloom soft and
damp
Is heavy with the scented laurel-bloom,

Now turning faint with languishment of joy,
Having kept wakeful all the warm night through ;
And on th' expectant air there hangs a dream
As if from hidden beds of hyacinths,
Down in the dell below among the leaves.
There is a swooning sweetness in the hour,
All overcharged with its own deep perfume,
And dim with rapture of the sunbeams stolen
Into the haunted heart of the smooth shade,
Which calls perforce upon the place, the time
To answer to its yearning self-delight,
And to let loose the soul invisible.
For surely, as I pass, the conscious air
Can hold no more its secret, but must speak,
Already overladen with its sighs
Of fragrance, and the balm of the musk-rose ;
And at the next turn of the golden day
The fate that trembles unrevealed around
Must step forth in some semblance palpable,
And must make one the heart of all things here,
Which now are throbbing to the unknown joy.
There cannot be but close, unutterable,
The coming of the crowning of the year.

And at my feet a flutter—and behold !
I tread among a softly-stirring crowd

Of slow and half-awakened butterflies,
As if the moist and tender heat of earth
Had breathed them forth new-born to the new day.
All down the path is suddenly alive
With grey and glistening films that break to life,
Their wet, furred wings unclosing momentarily,
About to spread into a golden cloud.
Folded in dew and moss and speechless sleep
Waiting ;—and now th' enchanted hour has come
That sets them free—a mist of starry shapes
They rise, to wander down the noonward way.

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A MOONLIGHT RIDE.

THROUGH the lands low-lying, fast and free
I ride alone and under the moon ;
An empty road that is strange to me,
Yet at every turn remembered soon :
A road like a racecourse, even and wide,
With grassy margins on either side ;
In a rapture of blowing air I ride,
With a heart that is beating tune.

Light as on turf the hoof-beats fall,
As on spongy sod as fast and fleet,
For the road is smooth and moist withal,
And the water springs under the horse's feet ;
And to every stride sounds a soft plash yet,
For all the length of the way is wet
With many a runnel and rivulet
That under the moonlight meet.

O surely the water lilies should be
Sunk away and safe folded to rest !
But, no ; they are shining open and free,
White and awake on the water's breast :
On the long and shimmering waterway,
All silver-spread to the full moon's ray,
The shallow dykes that straggle and stray
With their floating fringes drest.

The road will flow winding and winding away
Through the sleeping country to-night :
All one long level of dusky grey,
The border hedges slip past in flight ;
Turning and twisting in many a lane,
Mile after mile of a labyrinth chain
I have seen before, I shall see again,
Yet remember not aright.

And somewhere all out of sight there stands
A sleeping house that is white and low,
Hid in the heart of the level lands,
The lands where the waters wander slow,
Embowered all round by the thickset ways,
Set in a silent and stately maze
Of high-grown ilex, arbutus, bays,—
If I ever saw it, I do not know.

Shall I ever reach it? or ere the day
Breaks, will it all have passed away?

 If only the night might last !

While the mists of moonlight the warm air fill,
Out of boskage and bower so deep and still

There reaches afar the glimmer, the thrill,—

 O the night is flying too fast !

A PALACE.

IN a vast court are many fountains playing,
 Upon their silver spray the moonlight falls.
 With broken shadows down their long line straying,
 About them stand the great quadrangle walls.

Like spreading lakes the even waters sleeping
 Within their banks of marble brim the space ;
 Bright columns upward from their surface leaping,
 And flashing through the wide enchanted place.

The countless casements from afar look down,
 The moonbeams sparkle on them full and fair ;
 I never once have seen them open thrown,
 Nor any face for but a moment there.

In the lone nights it is a long delight
To bathe at will in those moon-lighted waves,
Floating from fountain unto fountain white,
Into the heart of their foam-wreathen caves.

Where, bubbling up and up and curling o'er,
Their mazy circles break, and from them all
A thousand waves at once bewildering pour
In the swift dashing of the waterfall.

And passing under them, to lie beside
The tall thin columns held in glittering thread,
That high in air drop their cold showers aside,
Slow and delicious on the yielding bed.

Enfolded round in all that liquid chillness,
Shadowed among the shadows, it is sweet,
Borne scarcely moving through the smoothèd stillness,
Where musical the flowing waters meet.

I weary not, for ever-changing dashes
From the dark ripple of the endless pool
The margin-mist of pearl, and diamond flashes
Shoot towards the stars, with wafts of winnowing cool.

Ceaseless they stream, far down in rapid glimmer
They mingle still and pour above, below,
Passing into the shadow dim and dimmer ;—
I have not seen their end nor where they go.

I cannot tell within what lonely land
These watery ranges are enclosed and laid,
Nor the surrounding piles that silent stand
Stretching afar in broken light and shade.

Nor by what spell at nights they reappear,
When they have long been lost and out of mind.
The same as they have stood for many a year,
With darkness all around them and behind.

These marble courts have been so long deserted,
My step the solitude rings through and through,
Half fearful of itself and half uncertain
If in its echoes others mingle too.

Some presence, hiding part and part revealing,
Lurks in each darkling porch and buttress cleft :
From pillar unto pillar quickly stealing,
I cross the ground, looking not right nor left.

Till shelterless the moon's full rays discover
A terrible white stretch of snow-white stone ;
An unknown peril drives me breathless over,
Yet having passed, I still am there alone.

And entering through the palace-doorways open,
I find the vast and empty halls my own ;
Year after year the place has been familiar,
Yet its whole length has never yet been known.

Dimly and softly lamps unseen are burning
All down the endless vista every side,
Broad flights of stately stairs lead upward turning
In shadowy heights, and right and left divide.

And other sombre staircases are leading
Down underground mysterious and cold ;
Opening all round, and out of sight receding
The long and vaulted corridors unfold.

Into this deep and labyrinthine hollow,
Where the same mild unchanging light has shone,
Fearless and with a keen intent I follow
Through empty passages still on and on.

Each time I find myself within the winding
Of this low wandering crypt known but to me.
This time at least must fortune favour, finding
At last, I hope, the long-sought mystery.

Yet it remaineth without end or reading,
Suddenly gone, before I touch the clue :—
On other days my search bends upwards, leading
To the dim galleries lengthened out of view.

Door after door all down the archways splendid
I open and I enter, and behold
The dusky rows of chambers never-ended,
All richly furnished, waiting as of old.

But never any sign of presence living,
Nor sound of any movement but my own,
As fast I tread the floors of velvet giving
A muffled echo to my steps alone.

They stand and wait, in unexplored number,
Darkling in gloom confused that shifts and errs.
—Through the recesses of its charmed slumber,
Yet are there other nights when something stirs.

And all the great mysterious mansion quivers,
And moves, with shadows everywhere unseen
But close at hand ; yet none of them delivers
By speech or shape what their uprisings mean.

All is awakened, and the night is trembling
With a strange sense of wonder and of fear ;
Who knoweth what they are, or why assembling,
That have possession of the darkness here ?

The fear grows fast,—I fly,—as if pursuing
The palace all behind me seems to close ;
But opens still before at the undoing
Of each new door, and still new scenes it shows.

Between the gilded rooms, no signal guiding,
With trembling fingers I unlock the door,
Knowing not but that at the next in hiding
I meet the very thing I flee before.

Yet still the fear is mastered by the wonder,
The swift, strange glimpses fresh at every turn,
The secret things that lie beyond and under
Impatient to my restless question burn.

The heavy curtains sweep in purple shimmering
Down the whole height of the luxurious walls,
And from the pictured ceilings silver glimmering
A fluctuating lustre softly falls.

Books are there, floating perfumes, vases golden,
Unfolded silken coverings orient-dyed,
Signs all about of costly service holden,
And scattered robes thrown carelessly aside.

Within these mazes manifold entangled
I traversing these great saloons perceive
Each of them has four doors and stands four-angled,
And one of these I choose, and three I leave.

Which is the right one? But no time to ponder,
For the wild terror seizes me too near ;
Behind me the unseen, before me yonder
The unknown—both a breathless rush of fear.

If I should miss !—then all at once is over ;—
And yet not fear alone my flight compels :
The longing some strange secret to discover
Is still the strongest of these silent spells.

Dashing through one, and in an instant's glancing
Choosing the next, and bounding straight across
The spacious passage, in the swift advancing
Of those who follow, every moment's loss

Destruction !—scarce my fingers turn for trembling
The handle, and no time to draw it close ;
Open behind me streams the endless mystery
Of all this magic midnight house of foes.

Yet, head to foot with the approaching capture
Panting and shuddering, mingles therewithal
An unexplained and unaccounted rapture
As of some mighty marvel to befall.

I turn at length, still onward blindly speeding,
Into one room from whose enclosing wall
There is no other door nor opening leading ;
—I am at the inmost chamber of them all !

Here is the end, and I am trapped within it ;
My eyes are hidden waiting for the blow
To fall,—at last has come the fatal minute :—
For what?—I wake, and still I do not know.

A STARRY SIGN.

I DWELT within a city of old days,
Beside a river ;—all who dwelt therein
Feared God, and served him, and obeyed his
 voice,
And listened for it, and abode in peace.
There was no thought of poverty or wrong
Between us, and our prayers rose day by day
In harmony, and all the days were fair ;
Yet hope of something fairer ever kept
The stirring of a live flame at the heart.
And in those days a new portent was seen
In heaven ;—for in that city night by night
All read the stars,—having no other book,
And knowing them by name, and loving them
As living lights along the mortal way.
But now amid the white familiar host
Would suddenly break forth some unknown star,

Or sometimes many stars, of splendour strange,
And mystic message from the lords of life.
At even or at midnight or towards dawn
The vision came, and in the depths of heaven
The new stars shone, and this was in their power—
One only could behold them, and that one
Who saw them, him they called and drew away,
So that he might but follow, east or west,
As the sky held them ; and he passed the gate
With his eyes fixed upon them, following
Their glory, else invisible to all.
But none of all who passed returned again,
Nor could they speak aright the semblances
Of what they saw, nor that whereby their star
Differed from other stars ; but most the light
On their own faces told us of some joy
Hidden from us, and incommunicate.

Now over all the city sweet and still
Brooded a shadow of mysterious hope,
Unmixed with fear, for heaven and man were
 friends ;
Yet not on every night the signs appeared,
But often far between,—or yet again
On some auspicious hours they crowded in,
Fast following, or together : therefore all

Watched the blue skies and waited their own turn,
Each praying for this favour of the spheres :

And as the sun set and the twilight grew,
The footfalls of the multitude would pass
And murmur of their voices through the streets.
And twilight deepened, and the echoes spread.

Until some happy eyes beheld at length
Their own, their star, in heaven ! Then thrilled
the throngs

With but the shadow of the gift unseen ;
But they, the seers, departed, leaving those
Behind them, still uplifted with desire ;
And some would watch all night unsatisfied.

The sun had set—the Evening Star shone clear
In a clear sky, and a half-moon arose ;
The roofs lay low on the horizon line,
And wide between the river and the street
Stretched the embankment, to and fro of which
I wandered with the rest ;—the air was cool ;
Upon the moving faces out of doors
Dimness began to fall, and through the dusk
Thickened the stream of voices and of feet.
When lo ! it was there before me—mine alone,
My star !—I knew it, and my heart stood still.
O glory greater than believed before !

There throbbing through the depths electrical,
Not one but seven, a constellation hung
Low down in the violet North, in ordered sign,
Large golden-globed like lamps, and in their light
Burned words and utterance greater than all words;
While round about me buzzed the rumour caught
Of my preferment in the grace of heaven,
And all the eyes were straining after mine
To share the opened treasure—but in vain.
But I no longer knew of aught save joy,
And a quick pulse of measureless desire
Close to the height of its accomplishment;—
Whither, O whither? Stay! I come, I come!

I know not now if there was any one
Or anything to leave: I had no care
But to press onward through the golden door.
Kind hands and voices bade farewell to me,
Wistful and yet not envious, and I went
Out of the gates alone;—I crossed the bridge;
And on to meet the heavenly messengers
Moved through the night; there floated scents of
 hay
And dewy honeysuckle as I trod
The river-meadows deep in folded flowers
Cool to the feet; but still those burning stars

Burned in my heart, and held my eyes apart
From all the under-world. I scarcely knew
Whether I passed by bush or brake or bower ;
The flutterings of the young birds in the nests,
The stirrings of small wild things in the grass,
The whirring past of dusky wings awoke
The silence of the shadows round the way ;
But music visible was awake in heaven,
And all my spirit, awake and answering,
Moved to its measure without speech or sound.
O golden lights, how stedfastly ye glow !

—
Pass not too soon, O Night ! Keep close awhile
The folded secret of thy solemn skies !
Let not the full light stream from open doors
So golden-glorious as to overpower
The silver silence of these hours of thine !
O passionate and overcoming spell,
Sweeping with measured strokes to the unknown,
—Whether more sweet than music of a dream,
Whether more terrible than trump of doom,—
Can that once known be once or evermore
So precious as this shadowy suspense ?
O over-swift and over-exquisite
Passage of unfulfilled expectancy,
Lengthen out all thy limits to the last !

What can the whole heaven give to me when
gained

More than this fleeting rapture of the way?

For I am coming, coming at your call,

Immortal ! yours I am whose motions sway

All worlds in unity, and with their own

Measure and rule the motions of my blood ;—

Whose waves of fire sweep down the fretted
chords

Through all the heights and depths of cosmic
change

In the illimitable fountain stream,

Downward in dissolution slow and sad,

Upward in rushing resurrection flame ;

Who, through the uttermost deeps invisible,

Spirit to spirit make the music sound

That endlessly unites and re-unites

In breathless chain without an interval,

That reaches to you in the conscious will,

That quickens to you in the blind desire,

Bursting the cerecloth of the buried seed,

Stirring the young life in the orbèd shell

To tender flutter under brooding wings ;—

One of your kingdom, signed and sealed to you

By visible bond and token, even mine,

The question of your face is turned on me,

And all my life incorporate with yours
Springs upward in one answer, home to you !

Deepen, O darkness of the hollow blue
Around me ! crowded with the quivering plumes
That in pale flame invisible shoot up,
Opening and shutting, to the highest arch
Of palpitating heaven ; that fan the night
With airs whose fulness steals the soul away
To the unseen dominions whence they breathe.
Float ever thinner, veils of filmy light,
Drawn from refulgence of another sphere,
That hath in it no heat or heart of fire,
Yet whose illumining is as a robe
Surrounding soul and sense with outward joy,
And an investiture of wings supreme.
O pause in heaven, ye stars ! and grudge me not
The minutes of this priceless wandering !
Once yours, I never can be here again
Part of this earth whereon I still set foot,
And all her works and ways that mix in me,
And make this message that I have of you
A something strange and new and wonderful
Whereof I am not wholly yet possess.
The mystery of your undeciphered scroll
Beats in my heart, a joy too great to hold,

And at the threshold of your palaces
I linger long on every crystal stair
Bridging the fathomless gulfs of ecstasy ;
And tremble as before the temple doors,
While from within them sweeps a breeze of sound
Dissolving heaven with sweetness, and the soul
Swoons, and is changed within it, and forgets ;
And lift no hand in haste toward the veil,
Lest the unutterable splendour strike
This starry purple into distance cold.

The heart of heaven is open everywhere,
Harkening in infinite hush of ravishment,
And in the midst my soul, stayed in her flight,
Hovers in the clear darkness of suspense,
Listening intent and saying, Not yet, not yet ;
Be not too quick in coming ; leave me still
The shadowy glories of the unfulfilled,
The faint far snatches echoing worlds away.
I ask not whither ye are leading me,
For, filled with the delight of following,
No room is left me to desire the end.

I am in the open, many miles away,
High on the slope of a long shelving down,
And under me the wide and waving weald

Grows wider with each upward step I take.
The lapsing hours have changed the starry face
Of the clear sky, and up to regnant height
The sovereign moon has floated through the midst ;
And fronting still, still level to my eyes
Those seven fair faces shining full on me.
All silent, in a calm and raptured dream
Slumbers the earth, lying with upturned face
All one white rippling smile, that far away
In bosoming woods and fields and villages
Sinks to the ring of shadowy under-world.
Stretching in long uninterrupted light,
Low at my feet the delicate hillside turf
Glitters in threads of silver all the way.
All the wide world is empty, save of peace
And utter radiance of the heavenly height ;
And the cool air that wavers fitfully
Across the flood of glory golden-white
Breathes through me with a rapture swift and strong
The thrill of that disclosure presently.
Above me, to the vanishing of space,
Heaven beyond heaven arises, thronging through.
Ready to hear the wingèd soul away ;
While earth enlarges her horizon bound,
And grows more lovely and more lustrous pale
For every instant of the blissful night.

I know I am all alone on the white down ;
My eyes are to the stars, and following them
My feet are half forgetful that they climb ;
But something sudden on the smooth ascent
Draws my looks downwards in a moment's pause.
And there I see a flower felicitous
Spread to the moon—spread low, a coronal
Of pointed leaves, and in the midst one stalk
Of starry faces, the auricula.
In the strong moonlight all their open eyes,
The dusky richness of their velvet hues,
Startle me with distinctness, and I stand
Amazed and lost in a new wonderland
Of strange delight. What mystic influence
Already has begun to change for me
The surface of the world?—for never yet
A flower like this was seen on hills like these.
And stooping down to pluck it I perceive
That in a moment all the grass has grown
Alive with springing of them everywhere,
Full-blown and wide-awake ; I cannot step
For fear of treading on them strewn so thick ;
They almost speak, they look up in my face,
As the clustered stars look down.—Ah ! what is
this? . . .

A MID MAY MYSTERY.

A SILVER dream of waters to the East,
A golden dream of meadows to the West,
A rosy dream of blossoms to the South,
A shadowy dream of elm-trees to the North.

The East lies charmed and stilly through the white
Midnight wherein the maythorns meet the moon ;
The strewn pear-blossom and the daisies light
The long grass and the edges of the pool.

The West lies all one sloping spread of gold
Down the wide meadows to the setting sun :
A sea of buttercups, beneath whose fold
The earth lies warm and laughs with living light.

A little gust of wind may stir and pass
Among the wilderness of apple-trees ;
All the deep sky above, all the deep grass
Below, is filled with bloom innumerable.

Tall stands the wall of trees within the line
Of its own shadow, ever dusk and dim,
Down at its feet th' unfading laurustine,
And the blue iris weave a mist of flowers.

Four walls of dreams, and what should they uphold
But the blue dome of heaven in all its height?
And what of sunny space should they enfold
But all the open glory of the day?

And yet not so,—a measured sanctuary
Is theirs, and passing feet may enter in ;
The gates of it are seen as men go by,
And some have dwelling there, and some have life.

They do indeed encompass and enclose
A very pleasure-house of cedar shade,
With gleam of lawns and crimson tulip-glows,
And flutter of white robes and youthful feet.

But whereof are they boundaries, and for whom?
Are they from inside or from outside set?
Spread from some conscious centre in their room,
Or built round guarded treasure hidden there?

The jewel lighting up the inmost shrine,
The soul that outward weaves its sanctuary,
Both are the same, and both seem half-divine
In the throbbing air mixed by the nightingales.

What name, what form?—A lamp?—a hearth of
home?—

A poet's heart?—a rose of man's desire?
Or of a full-blown hour not twice to come,
The crowning, still more radiant and more fair?

Here set beyond the chance of time and change,
Awhile at least to sense and sight revealed,
That which makes all the sunlight rapture-strange,
That which makes all the moonlight magical.

More white than folded lilies of the East,
More golden than the meadows of the West,
More rosy than the orchards of the South,
More shadowy than the dark dream of the North.

A HAUNTED HOUSE.

THE lawns are bright, the paths are wide,
The roses are bursting on every side.

All around the bowers are green,
And the shining laurels a folding-screen.

The large fruit ripens on many a tree,
Purple and gold drooping heavily.

Of health and wealth a hidden spell
Is scattered by hands invisible.

Young, and gladsome, and free they meet—
Voices of laughter and running feet.

Whether the seasons be dark or fair,
It is always summer and sunshine there.

And like a fountain that springs and falls,
There flows sweet music between the walls.

Among the guests one comes and goes
Whom no one sees and no one knows.

A neck more stately, a face more fair
Than any that meet and mingle there.

There is heaped up many a gay sea-stone,
One pearl lies among them all alone ;

With a golden halo all about,
The full moon's face from the clouds looks out ;

All cold on the breast of the crimson sky,
The star of the evening seems to lie.

Shining as pale, apart as far
As the pearl, or the moon, or the evening star,

That orbèd face, with its curvings rare,
Floats out from its waves of dusky hair,

With its eyes of shadow, its archèd eyes,
Whose lost looks dream upon Paradise.

One only knoweth it in the throng ;
One knoweth too well, and knoweth too long.

The others are ever unaware,
Though it pass and meet them in the air,

With sighs like the sighs of the summer night,
Breathing of love and of lost delight.

That haunting vision of yearning pain,
One moment strikes and then fades again.

It rises up at the music's sound,
And sinks before they can look around.

If they catch one sight of the crownèd brow,
A sunbeam glances from bough to bough.

If a low voice thrills in the air along,
It is but the dying note of the song.

Not to sadden, only to share,
To the feast unbidden that guest comes there.

Lovely as lilies ungathered, and white,
The house is filled with a dream at night.

From chamber to chamber, from door to door,
Not a sound is heard, nor step on the floor ;

Through the shadowy hush as white wings win ;
Peace be to this house, and to all within !

The little children sleep soft and sweet ;—
Who stands beside them with soft white feet ?

The soft white hands pass over their hair ;—
Sleep on, dear children, so safe and fair !

Till, where two are sleeping side by side,
Doth a dream at last between them glide.

* * * * *

Of all the angels that guard the place,
The least is not that forgotten face.

SUMMER LOST.

WHAT is the summer
Of which they speak?
How shall we find it?
Where shall we seek?

The spring has passed over,
It would not stay ;
It was too bright,
So it vanished away.

I saw the white stars
Over the grass,
And the daffodils golden
Arise and pass.

The merles were singing
As evening fell
Of something coming
Too sweet to tell.

A whisper flushed
Through the twilight pale ;
The lily, the rose,
And the nightingale.

I listen for them ;—
And what has come ?
The leaves are falling,
The birds are dumb.

The scentless sunflowers
Are open brown ;
Through empty branches
The rain pours down.

Is this the summer
I waited for ?
Is it come ? or coming
Nevermore ?

A MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM.

PART I.

AT midday or at midnight it is dim
Under the Dome ; but the high altar lights
Mark the high hours, and one forgets the sun.
For never could in any sunshine sweep
Such floods of music, overmastering
The vast and glooming spaces, sad and strong
As Love in strife with Death. The full choir swells
And falls, in long-drawn passionate harmony,
And all the great Dome seems as built and borne
On music only, save where gloriously
Burns the high altar in its hundred lights
Dazzling and tall, and over all of them
Rises the Crucifix, and from its height
Christ with the Crown of Thorns looks down and
reigns.

I know not whether it was night or day,
Being always twilight there ;—the music pealed ;
Row above row the altar tapers burned
Up to the feet of Christ ;—the incense rose
In dreamy clouds, and higher rose the chaunts,
As if they sang for One, and One alone,
He hearkening in His passion unto them.
O Christ ! they chaunted, conquer Death for us !
Remember us as we remember Thee ;
We are Thine, and Thou art ours for evermore !
And in the midst, Christ crucified, adored,
Uplifted on the music and the lights,
Seemed not to suffer, only to endure
In silent rapture of unshrinking calm.
The hour is come, the Son is glorified,
And Thou, O God, art glorified in Him !
Sang the sweet voices in a solemn strain.
And still the heart and eyes drew to the One
Set for a sign there betwixt earth and heaven,
And felt it was not hard to watch with Him.

I know not how the passionate hours went by ;
But they were ending, and the High Mass done :
And those who filled the great cathedral floor,
Seeming at home in the warm shadowy space,
Began to pour away ; the chaunts went low

And sorrowing, and single voices wailed
As in farewell ; and one by one the lights
Extinguished on the altar, left the Dome
In darkness, and the last note sank away.
The footfalls of the multitude grew faint
Toward the far doors, and none turned back to
look,
Departing to the outer life and air.
The dim and empty height grew cold and grey ;
The smoke from dying tapers curled around
The dying Christ, and He was left alone
Upon His Cross, without a worshipper.
And now indeed the Passion of His soul
Began to enter into me, and I
Was loth to leave Him too ;—the hour of light
And music was for Him and us ; but all
The hours of silence and of darkness were
For Him alone ; and while we slept or went,
Upon the Cross He suffered evermore.
So some long time it seemed I watched with Him,
Under the drooping brows and stiffening limbs ;
And then my heart was weary too, and I
Left Him, and He remains there all alone.

PART II.

I found myself abroad in the fresh dark ;
The dawn was not yet broken ;—where I was
I knew not, but I walked upon my way
Swiftly and surely, neither wondering
Why I was there, nor thinking where I went.
It may have been a short road or a long,
Before I heard a twittering from the roofs.
And saw the faint low light round all the sky,—
For it was Midsummer Day. Then I perceived
The open cornfields either hand of me :
And, far away, beheld the shadowy plain
Before me break into a billowy crest
Of high and higher hills ; and still beyond,
The great veiled altar steps, height above height.
Thrilled me with their grey glimpses ; but as yet
The darkness and the mists were over them.

Then knew I, I was walking all alone
Through the Garden of the Earth : and as I went
Familiar things grew clear about my path.

The swinging garlands of the happy vines
From mulberry tree to mulberry ; the upspring
Of the maize stems ; the meadows rather blue
Than green, for flowers ; the frequent villages
Awaking, with their gilded metal signs,
And stir of swallows, and the trailing rose
Of the carnations in their balconies.

All shapes grew plainer. Now upon my right,
I saw the Mountain of the Sanctuary,
Still sleeping, white ; and farther yet the hills,
Clear, separate, perfect each from base to crown,
Each with its immemorial name and tale,
Which rise so gently from the flowery plain,
That one may stand knee-deep in grass below,
And lay one's hand upon the soft green swell,
And say, This is the first step of the stair
That reaches up to Heaven. And far in front
Stretched the dark line of the sublimer range
From farthest heaven to heaven ; and still beyond,
Chain above chain the awful Alpine heights
Began to form themselves in misty air.
Peak after peak stood out in its own place,
Grey from the purple. In the very midst,
Far over all, hung high in upper blue,
Above the myriad mighty mountain-tops,

A vision that might be the Throne of God
Brake forth unfolding, unapproachable,
Pale, shadowy, peerless ; and I bowed my head,
For I knew the Queen of Heaven.

The light spread fast.
The sky was growing radiant. Now drew nigh
The hour supreme of all the earth, that brings
Once every day the marriage of the Sun
With Monte Rosa ; and of all the year
This was the day supreme. The earth lay still
And waited in a deep and dewy calm :
The bloom of all the year was at its full.

The glorious mountain stands white as a bride,
Alone, above. The lesser mountain lights
Stand for a hundred miles from east to west
Unkindled yet. Unnumbered shimmering ways,
Melting from moonlight into ashen grey,
Mark the mysterious kingdom of the snow ;
The upper world, with all its territories,
Stretches itself in revelation clear
At this pale hour. Suddenly quivers up
A flame in the East. The white side thrills and
heaves
In a wave of gold, as if a chord had struck

Of a vast music, and we scarce can tell
If we see or hear, so fast the glory rolls
In the great rush of the angel of the light.
Whiter and whiter shine th' immortal fronts
Before the coming touch, till all at once
The colour and the radiance break on them,
And lift them into unapproachèd heaven,
Lying aloft there in their crimson dream ;
While sweeping giant shadows to the West
In violet darkness go before the fire.

Slowly it comes—it comes ! The beacon-fires
Draw towards the feet of the Mount marvellous,
A change begins to flutter over her.
The Flower of the World unfolded waits to know
The mightier Monarch, and the Master's rod
Omnipotent, and all her pride grows pale.
Through all the silvery spaces in the highest,
Of the supreme and solitary shape,
A murmurous movement like a child's asleep
Rises and falls, until our own hearts beat.
Hush now ! she stirs,—she has felt the wings afar
Sweep through the sapphire silence of the skies :
The awfulness of a great change comes close.
And now one wan swift shudder visibly
Runs over her, and leaves her still more white.

There is a moment that we dare not see.
Then we look up, and lo ! the glory in heaven !
One reddening wave of utter loveliness
Drowns all her pearly light in overflow ;
And glowing through the still suspended depths,
The lamp of roses, the celestial face
Seems lighted from the passionate heart within ;
Till all th' intense blue of the heavens beyond
Seems to burn from her, set a sovereign there,
With the resurrection kiss upon her brow.
O Rose of God, fade not, nor float away !
Crowned by thy conqueror, rule and reign the
lands
That blossom from the rivers of thy breast !

The sun is in heaven, the larks are in the air.
This was a battlefield of liberty
Not long ago ; the very earth I tread
Seems to send back glad echoes to my feet.
Beside the fountain of Saint Ambrose sat
A child of three years old with naked limbs,
And blue eyes sweet and fearless, and bright hair
And cheeks,—some mother's perfect piece of joy.
This was the first face I had met that morn :
It laughed good-morrow to me with a kiss.

Leaving the main road I began to ascend
A circuit to the right. Past gate and shrine,
A broad and stony road, the Pilgrim's Way,
Wound upward, with a chapel at each turn.
The banks were delicate with harebell stems
Taller than the tall grass, and wild deep pinks ;
The chestnut trees threw shadows on the moss.
As I gained higher, the unfolding hills
Opened themselves beneath me, dale and swell
Of smoothest sward for many a heaving mile,
With many a green track leading to the brow,
Then dropping downward to some hollow unknown.
—Fain would I follow, and find the other side,
But my way held me to it. Overhead
In front of me the hillside falcons wheeled ;
And as the slope grew steeper, down below
Sheer from the wall the meadows fell away
In one long roll of herbage deep and damp,
Golden with globe-flower and marsh-marigold
I passed the Station of Calvary, nor sighed ;
And quickly mounting through the morning air,
Stood at the steps of the Sanctuary itself,
The centre of the little huddled pile,
That on the summit of a thousand feet
In ancient rock and masonry is set
Together, like one many-cornered stone.

Hostel and street and walls were all awake
On the Mount of the Madonna ; fresh and clear
The new day shone upon the gilded spires
And the white Convent. Entering into shade
Of the low inn, I found a spacious room
Set ready for me, cool and brown and dim.
There I sat down,—and as one waited for,
They put their best before me : fresh baked loaves,
Whereon to break my fast, new milk and eggs,
White mountain cheese, and fruit, and tender meat
In crisp and yellow fillets, parsley strewn :
Closed by a cup of cool and purple wine
From the hill's foot. The walls were bare and
rough,
And the low windows looked into the street
In shadow ; but the farther end was lit
Towards a rude loggia looking to the sky.
And through the window opening to the ground
A sunbeam stole ;—I rose and followed it
Out to a little terrace and low wall ;
There leaned and looked—but looked and saw no
more.
For on my knees I sank, and hid my eyes
In a rain of tears, so suddenly it brake,
A vision like to Moses' ere he died ;
For,—rested in mid air, and all the earth

70 *A Midsummer Day's Dream.*

A thousand feet below me,—lay the land,
—The tears rise now when I remember it,—
The land lay all below me far away ;
The land that all men have desired and dreamed,
The land that ever ravished cannot fade,
The land that ever trampled cannot die,
The land that draws a thousand miles away,
Unerring through the awful mountain gates,
Unknown the unknown spoilers on their march,—
The Plains of Promise to the pilgrim's feet,
Stretching for ever in level of living green,
Lost low down in the glory of the light.
While silver bands unrolling glittered out
In league-long stretches, here and there, away,
Historic rivers of the sacred soil.
And the first lake was silver, and the next
Opal between low hills, and on the third
The light of heaven lay blue, and farther yet
Lake beyond lake in purest azure lay
Beneath the morning mountains. On the verge
Of the horizon, rather felt than seen,
Hovered and brooded in a radiant haze
Many a musical and ancient name.

There on the utmost East a light film lies,
Vavering and grey, with broken gleams of white.

There is it, but I know not if I see,
My eyes strain to it, my blood thrills to it,
All the plain reaches to it gloriously,
The great old City of the Emperors.
And as I gazed, and strove to find it clear,
The vision of it seemed to rise on me
And overshadow, and I stood within
The vast and vaulted space, the golden choir
Gleaming amid the gloom, the rainbow-flood
Of splendour smiting from the farther side,
And drowning all between in one full flow.
A mighty floor of shadow and stateliness,
Ready for sweeping in of some high pomp
In movement measured by the music's march ;
The iron crown upon a monarch's brow
Won from the wars, or marriage of a queen.
Thousands still pressing onwards, and still room,
Crimson and gold and shining white array
Mingling from pillar to pillar ;—and at once,
Here as I dream, what is it suddenly
Rings with a silver clangour that stirs the blood ?
A peal of coronation !—such a sound
As from the highest tower of any town
Floats far and wide to tell triumphant news.
Can the bells sound so fifty miles away ?
Or is it there, or here, or out of heaven,

The faint, far, glorious sound? Howe'er it be,
I still was standing on the Holy Mount,
Quiet above the noises of the world,
And still was gazing on the peaceful plain,
Lovelier than the lost Eden, yet still mine.
And all the stillness of the morning stole
Into my spirit ; and the cloudless light
And the unspeakable sweet strength of the air
Breathed into me, and I felt calm and glad.

Needs must I leave the hospitable house :
The day was but begun ;—who knows how far
One has to travel ere the day be done ?
All the poor people of the little place
Thronged at the doors to see a stranger pass ;
And many of them sad and over-aged,
Sick, dull, disfigured, in the midst of all
The glory round them ;—why should these things
be ?

But then it grieved me not,—I only knew
They asked of me, with hands and voice and eyes,
As of one going, happier than themselves.
And what I had of money, among them all,
All showering 'God be with you' with one voice,
I gave away, and saw their eyes grow glad,
And hardly noted I had nothing left

Myself ;—but I was light of heart that morn,
And free, and set forth on my way once more,
As one who had no more need of anything
Silver could buy, nor would want food again.

Under the very sanctuary I passed,
The way being built and hollowed in the rock ;
And in the vaulted roof a stone is set,
Most ancient, that from immemorial times
Has here been guarded on the Sacred Mount,
Engraved with letters of an unknown tongue ;
And none of all the wise and learned men
Who from all lands have hither, pilgrims, come,
Can read the letters or can tell the tongue,
Or guess its history or its intent.

Issuing upon the other side, the way
Was hot already, for the sun was high :
Still there were hours to spare before the noon.
Midsummer Day is long : if God should give
But one day in our lives for happiness,
Surely it would be kind to choose that day.

Out of the white rock leaned and brushed my hand
A flower of velvet, rich and dark and strange.
Lightly I plucked the light green tender stalk,

And took the orchis, larger than the wont
Of the bee-orchis, like the queen of them,
A mystic message marking in its flesh
Letters more rare than on the graven stone,
Not to be spelled by every careless eye.
For many flowers are lettered curiously,
And few have read them ; or, if they have read,
Fewer have told their secrets ;—and to some
Such reading is not needed, being themselves
One with the flowers in life more clear than speech,
Knowing them, and are known to them afar,
And having one growth with them underground.
And such a life and such a gift have I,
Which often in dark hours, in prison and pain,
Hath brought me subtle comfort, such as springs
In draughts of water freshly drawn from earth,
And such as steals down moonbeams winter-white,
Or is wafted by the wandering thistle-down
Out of the wild waste places far away.
But nought of secret or of spiritual aid
Needed I then, beneath the open skies
And open sun, for on this fair free day
All things were friendly to me,—even fate.

A few steps farther, and I came upon
A grassy promontory, hitherside

The Mount ; for now the plain behind me lay,
And hidden by the walls : another view
Lay full before me, opening up between
The hills, to meet the mountains and the lakes.
Entranced I paused, forgetful of the way,
For far beneath and far away, enclosed
In a dark frame of over-arching woods,
Down a long vista of the purple hills,
Lay the blue waters with a sacred name
Beyond them, waters never seen before,
As still as heaven, and deeper in their blue.
And all around and all beyond arose
The wilderness of mountains, with the hues
Of morning on them, and the morning clouds
Moving in softest shadows over them.

I needed not to rest, yet could not pass
The picture magically fair and still ;
So down I lay upon the thick warm grass,
Fragrant and full of many-coloured bloom,—
Milk-wort and orchis, clover, arnica,
Burnet and sage, daisy and astragale,
Bright lady's-fingers, and the meadow rue,
Scabious, and iris with the scarlet seed ;
And over them the joyous little moths,
Red, blue, and yellow, hung in company.

There was no other stir in the air,—I lay
And watched the perfect sapphire shine in sight,
Through the many miles of violet-shadowed air,
Till half I dreamed, and half I slept, o'erfilled
With loveliness that left not one desire.

But something touched me and I started up,
As one who has lost time. The way led now
At the same level, round the outer side
Of the next mountain, which at once arose
A clear two thousand feet above the first :
—The Mountain of Three Crosses, somewhat steep,
And on one side precipitous :—the brow
Is crowned with the Three Crosses, all of iron,
The largest in the midst. There were they found
These many hundred years ago, deep down
Below the earth, buried by unknown hands,
And by a vision to a Saint revealed ;
But whence they came, and how, and at what
time,
Remains a mystery, like the mural stone.
And from the second summit leads a path
To another mountain yet, the Field of Flowers,
The third one, and the highest of the range ;
Four thousand feet in height, a long fair ridge,
With soft and even slope on either side,

All green, all smooth, a perfect league of space.
For in the early ages, a great Saint,
The same whose name is all about the land,
Made war, and hither drove the Arian host,
And massacred them most religiously
Down to the last. This blood of heretics,
Spilt on the open hillside, left no voice
Of glory, but all humbly reconciled
With earth and dews and slow activities
Kept no more memory of men and strife.
But now the mountain is alive again
With the quick-springing armies of the soil,
And who can reach it (for the way is long)
In April, finds the distant sheets of snow
Drawn nearer change into the shining beds
Of the narcissus, and unwillingly
Treads down a hundred stars at every step :
And all the round of the year the mountain keeps
Its constant crown of flowers, from month to month
Flushing into a warmer wealth of bloom.

Not over, but around the mountain flank
My way was—a mere track upon the turf—
Turf as of sheepwalks, delicate and warm,
And all embedded, like the twisted hairs
In a bird's nest, with myriad tiny flowers

78 *A Midsummer Day's Dream.*

O hills ! which but to feel one's feet upon
Is worship ; where for every least footfall
Ten columns of campanulas bow down !
It was an air to bathe in ; every breeze
Streaming around me in a buoyant wave,
And flowing in full joy through every vein ;
And in this radiant morning, this sweet air,
The very earth I trod on seemed more rich
In mere content than any paradise.
Low wild rose-bushes straggled here and there
With open crimson flowers ; small downy tufts
Of the pink everlastings made a bed
Silkier and softer even than the sward,
With pillows of wild thyme ; the slope was strewn
With coloured stars, gentian and centaury ;
The wild laburnum copses to the left
Shaded away to meet the tangled heights,
And in their thickets the wild peony glowed.
Here it was joy to be alive and move ;
For such a quickness and a springing strength
The glorious freshness lent to heart and limb,
All thought of rest lay far away behind,
And I would so be going evermore,
Fearless and fleet, free and yet following,
As the swallow follows the spring across the sea.

At times the slope was mossy soft and damp,
With shade of chestnuts scattered ; under them
The beds of the May lilies still lay green,
But their white music gone. Round every stem
The green shoots clustered, and about them all
Green fairy gardens of the columbine,
And the tall Seal of Solomon bent down.
And the white orchis sprang up everywhere
Single above the moss, and all the flower
Of grasses trembled in a silver spray
Glistening through the green shadows ; wild and
white
Gleamed the large lamia with the purple spots ;
Hither and thither glanced the humming bees.
All things said, Stay, and keep the perfect hour ;
Once it is thine, it may not come again :—
Yet something unknown, unuttered, took me on.

Short seemed the miles ; at every turn sailed in
New mounts of marvel on the walls of heaven.
One I remember a few miles from here,
Perfect and clear in shape, from every point
It met me, in a steep and even slope
All round, and to the summit grassy smooth
With such grey-headed awful majesty

80 *A Midsummer Day's Dream.*

That as I gazed upon it ever rose
The thought of a mysterious altar spread
High under heaven, and immemorial rites.
And here, I said, have my forefathers come,
Druids and Seers, and worshipped ; for they knew
The spirits of the mountains in their forms,
And over all the world the second sight
Can note the sacred river, grove, or hill ;
And by the stirring of my blood I knew
This was an olden mountain of my race,
And drew me to it ; though I could not learn
Its name, yet I had seen it in the North,
And in the West before. Now, far away,
Eastward, where, inaccessible, the crags
Beyond a sea of mountains catch the light,
I saw the giant pair of eagles rise,
Whose shadows, like the shadows of a storm,
Sweep the long lake in one o'erdarkening rush
To mark the hour, then vanish till the next.
These I saw plunge into their path of light,
Till the great heights opposing darkened them.

I turned the mountain shoulder, heaving down
In long soft swells to meet the road again :
To the last mound I came, and waited there.
All round lay old white quarries, whence the town

Before me had been hewn ; among the heaps
Of broken stone the giant mulleins sprang.
Before me swam the liquid field of light,
The open lake that changes every hour
With all the living colours of morn and eve ;
And farther out five lakes flashed far and near,
Each a low sapphire set in golden round,
Spreading out sparkles under all the sky.
A light air moved through the delicious heat,
And softly stirred the hair about my neck ;
And looking downwards somewhat languidly,
I for the first time took note of myself,
And that I wore a summer gown of white,
Open and light :—and a vague wonder passed
Across me how I came there, and wherefore
I went : but on, without much pause or thought,
I moved again, descending to the road.

Now was the sun both high and hot in heaven,
And lizards darted all about the stones
Of the low wall on either hand, o'erspread
As with a curtain of the finest lace,
By countless delicate crimson-threaded stars
Of the white sandwort, and the waxlike blush
Of stonecrop all in flower, and interwoven
With all the starry and suspended bloom

82 *A Midsummer Day's Dream.*

Of saxifrage and starwort. As I neared
 The town, a great black viper suddenly
 Glided across the whole breadth of the road,
 And plunged into the flowery crevices ;
 A fearful power and swiftness in the coils
 That quivered into darkness. The first house
 I passed had set from garden-gate to door
 An avenue of lilies white and tall,
 Full-blown, and thick together. Next I passed
 Under high walls all clothed and waving down
 With the valerian's deep red tapestry,
 Glorious and crimson as if hung to greet
 A conqueror's entry. The small town was gay
 With children and with noise of crowing fowls ;
 A gilded crown of laurel for a sign
 Swung from the inn ; and opposite, the wall
 Was hollowed to a fountain, overhung
 With maidenhair ; many rude frescoes stood
 Over the gateways looking on the street.

I came down to the corner of the lake,
 Where grassy shore and shallow water meet ;
 And for some time the way wound by low creeks
 And brimming pools, where waterlilies lay
 Large and wide open, filled with frosted dew.
 The channels of the water-reeds were filled,

Through wandering levels of mysterious miles,
With hovering clouds of azure dragon-flies,
And greater brown ones glancing in swift pairs
Above the dazzling waters.

Thence I came
Out all among the cornfields and the vines.
The exquisite silver bloom of the wheat ears
Above the myriad sea-blue of the stalks,
Grown quick and fresh in slender stateliness,
Told of no thwarting of the wind or rain.
Love in a mist and Venus' looking-glass
Made gardens in the forest of the corn,
In dazzling masses. As the day drew on
All the more great and distant mountain heights
Drew like a heavenly amphitheatre
Nearer and clearer ; round the crystal sky,
Fading in every hue of hyacinth
From deepest purple to the palest rose.

Above the flowery bushes hovered clouds
Of butterflies just born, alive in the heat ;
Wherever glanced a tiny watercourse,
Under the chestnut or acacia leaves,
Out they flew as I passed, and fluttered on
Startling and silent, straight before my feet,

84 *A Midsummer Day's Dream.*

In gorgeous pairs with peacock wings immense,
Or a strange splendour of living marigolds ;
Yet in their winged glory, these bright things,
With but one day to live, and that for love,
In a mysterious salutation bowed,
—This is thy day, not ours. First one, and then
Another took up the perpetual chain
Of spangled dance that quivered down the road,
A flying line of fairy chamberlains,
Who pointed to some magic palace doors.

The open country narrowed by degrees
Into a closed and grassy vale, between
Wild slopes and cliffs, all of whose sides were
 clothed
With flower and leaf in tangle, ivory heads
Of privet, and tall orange lilies, mixed
With traveller's joy, and all the lesser bloom
Of pink and blue that carpeted the sward ;
The little waterfalls leaped down the rocks
At every turn. On a smooth open space
I came upon a rosebush standing wild
And all alone ; as tall and thick it stood
As the white thornbush of a hundred years
Where sings the nightingale. As I approached,
I saw that it was wreathed from head to foot

With the wild roses all in one full bloom
Hastened together ; every sweet rose smiled
Upon me as I came, all open wide
As if they waited for me, and just then
A sudden breeze as I passed under them
Shook down a shower of petals over me,
And I was covered by the lovely rain
All in a moment, soft on hands and face.

There was no cloud ; the full heat of the sun
Poured down upon me, but oppressed me not,
Nor I did weary with the length of way.
The amethystine mountains seemed to smile
Out of immeasurable heights of calm,
And all things waited for a trumpet burst
Of triumph. Now the little streams began
To gather into one, and slowly poured
Into a peaceful chain of narrow lakes ;
And down their bed the water-ousel flew
From stone to stone beside me, fearing not.

A little shallow lake without a bank,
Brimming the meadows either side of it,
All in one sheet of purple flower and flag,
But no firm footing ; all around it lay
The beds of myosotis, heavenly blue ;

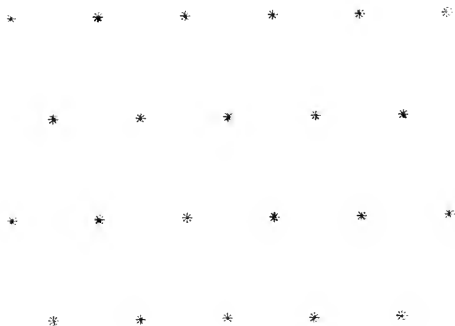
Myriads and myriads of the tenderest flowers
Wreathen in islands from the darker blue.
And as I passed they seemed to call to me
Half wistfully, 'Thou art going, but we stay ;'
And by their clear innumerable eyes
Withholding me again a moment more—
'Can life be sweeter anywhere than ours ?
Set here between soft water and soft sky
In the soft air ; we measure not our joy
By any pain or any hardness known ;
Nor ever will one cold wind blow on us ;
It is always summer where we are born and die.'
But swiftly on I passed, while still they gazed :
'Forget-me-not ! Forget-me-not !' they cried
In a million small sweet voices, and their cry
Entered into my heart.

Again I came
Into the open country, out among
The long lines of the mulberries and maize.
And now at full the fervour of the day
Began to stir the whole wide earth and heaven ;
The mountain peaks high up in shimmering heat
Like breasts of goddesses began to heave
Rosy amid the palpitating air ;
And all the world began to be alive

With a strange throb and tumult in my ears.
On the white road the chicory blue burned faint,
Strewn there like stars, and each star seemed a face
With dumb impatient passion beckoning me,
Come, come, make haste !—I followed where they
led.

There were no shadows : all the burning sun
Poured down upon me, but I slackened not
My pace, untired : the countless cicada
In every leaf, above, below, around,
Had but one note, Be quick, be quick, be quick !
The pink glad garlands of convolvulus
Ran down before me like the rose-leaves strewn
For a bride's steps, opening as fast and fleet
As I passed over them, and by their bells
I knew that it was on the stroke of noon.

PART III.



AWAKE.

RISE up, rise up, O dreamer !
The eastern sky is red ;
The trumpet's note is calling,
The storm is overhead.

Out of the myrtle mazes
Rise up and come away,
And leave thy charmed slumbers
At breaking of the day.

Come down, come down, O dreamer !
From thy aerial height,
Thy solitary strongholds
And mountains of delight.

Down in the trodden highway
Goes to and fro the crowd ;
About the market-places
The tumult waxes loud.

The gates of sleep slide open,
And past them lies a strand
That seems like one remembered,
The last of English land.

Where bent before our coming,
And smoothed beneath our tread,
The gold of gorse, the waxen heath,
The wild bog-myrtle bed ;

Bowed crisp and close and even
As for a dancing floor,
With fresh crushed odours speeding
The fleet feet evermore.

But in the world of waking
Whoso the straight path goes
Will find it steep and narrow,
With iron gates that close.

And there the feet pass bleeding,
O'er flint and thorn and brier,
And burning desert phantoms
But mock the parched desire.

And every breath is battle,
And every step a fall ;
And less than loss of all things
Shall win no way at all.

And all around are pressing,
Darkness behind, before,
Souls low and heavy-laden,
In struggle sad and sore.

These are thine own, thy nearest,
For this brief human space ;—
Break not thy bonds before-time,
Nor spurn the earth-bound place.

And if awhile thy dreaming
Did seem to bear thee far,
Rejoice it was but seeming,
While here thy brethren are.

And henceforth unescaping
The station of the Cross,
Renounce the lonely favour,
And take the lowly loss.

* * * * *

O gift unearned, unsought for !
O wafted ghostly grace !
Dost thou not mistlike sever
My heart from its own race ?

O magical pale banquet,
No common bread and wine,
Which all may share together
Where simple households dine.

O thin enchanted armour,
O moonbeam-woven mail,
No more ! Let human sorrow
Strike me without thy veil !

O Gardener of that garden,
Take back thy golden key !
Where others may not enter,
I pass no more with thee.

O robe star-strewn, embroidered,
O royal purple pall !
I loose you from my shoulders
Till my last sleep shall fall.

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For over-sweet is slumber
So near the dawn of day ;—
Could ye not watch with me one hour ?
The signals seem to say.

O Christ whose hour of coming
The stars of morning keep,
Let me be found to meet Thee,
Waking and not asleep !

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